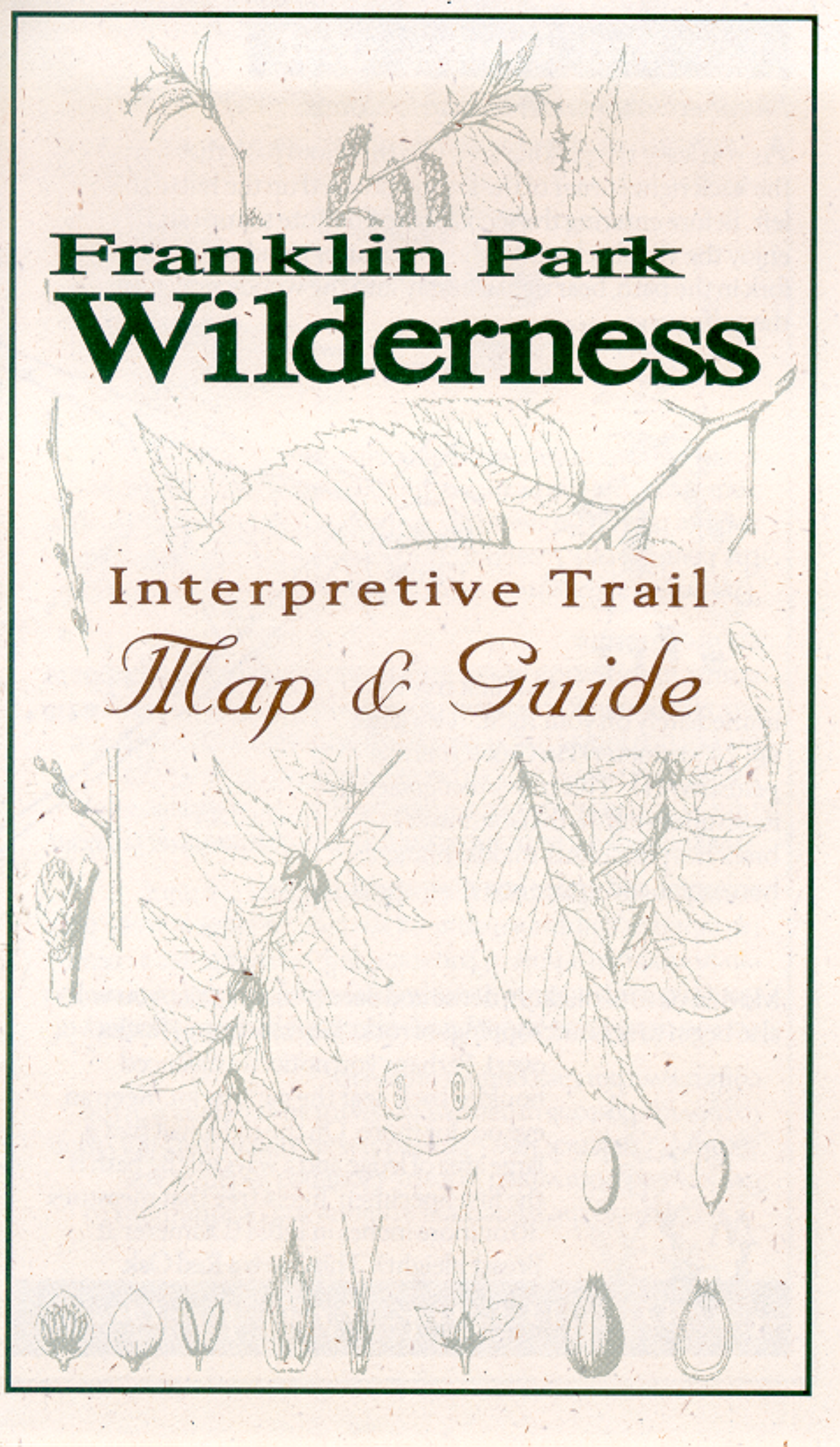
Franklin Park Wilderness

Interpretive Trail

Map & Guide



What Are Those Funny-looking Rocks Anyway?

Walking through the park and nearby neighborhoods you have probably noticed a knobby rock popping up here and there. In some places it covers large areas; in other places it drops off in cliffs, occasionally it shows up as huge boulders in what seem to be odd locations. You may have even noticed the Central Congregational Church on Berkeley and Newbury Streets, in Boston's Back Bay, looks similar.

The rock you've seen is called *Roxbury Puddingstone*. It is a form of *conglomerate*, a sedimentary rock created when rock fragments (sediments) are pressed together with some finer particles and cemented together. It's kind of like making cement, except here you'll notice instead of sand you've got a mix of rock fragments from small pebbles to brick-sized rocks. The rock fragments are usually smooth. This tells us that they were probably moved around by fast moving water, where they banged into each other and softened up their rough edges.

Imagine a fast moving mountain stream swiftly carrying these rocks to the base of a mountain. Over time, more rock fragments piled on top of them and they were buried. The pressure of the overlying sediments helped to press them into a new rock. When more recent mountains formed, some of these rocks came back up to the surface where you see them today. As for the big boulders such as that seemingly unbalanced one you see when you first enter the Wilderness area, it was probably moved there by a glacier during the last ice age. When the glacier retreated (its southern edge kept melting until what was left of it ended up way up in Canada) it left the big, heavy boulders behind. The Central Congregational Church reminds you of our local puddingstone because Richard M. Upjohn used *Roxbury Puddingstone* to build the church in 1867.

By Tara Richer, MA Dept. of Env. Mngt.

The Trees of Franklin Park

The White Oak is one of the best loved and most common Oaks in the eastern U.S. The gnarled, ascending, upper branches give it a beautifully proportioned, round crown. The bark has scaly plates and shallow fissures; in contrast the stout twigs are smooth and greenish red. In winter, the dried brown leaves persist on the tree, adding a pleasing warmth to the scene. White Oaks grow slow to and live to an impressive age.

The Pin Oak is a very popular, specimen lawn tree for many reasons. Nurserymen like it because it transplants easily with its fibrous root system, and because it is comparatively free of insects. Home owners are pleased with its quick growth, neat habits, and glossy foliage. It will stand city smoke and does not break easily in storms. The fine texture of the grayish brown bark, with tight, low, scaly ridges and neat shiny leaves, contribute to its formal look.

The Red Oak is one of the most beautiful and largest of the Oaks. It will grow 70 to 90 feet tall, and the diameter spread is even greater. The massive, stout trunk separates into several large limbs that radiate out from the trunk. Red Oaks will grow well under city conditions, and they are the fastest growing of all Oaks. They are also strong and durable in storms and practically free from insects and disease. The Red Oak grows best in deep, well drained soil.

A full grown American Beech is a massive tree, when grown in the open it has a wide, spreading, rounded head with many long, smooth, horizontal branches starting quite low on the trunk and sometimes sweeping the ground, and their bark is a satin smooth silvery, grayish blue. Beech trees are slow growing; as the tree becomes older, the bark is marked with irregular, darker bands. Beech are among our best ornamental trees.

The Eastern Hemlock is one of the most beautiful of our cone-bearing trees. It has a dense, conical crown that becomes somewhat irregular as the tree grows older. The trunk is tapering, with deeply divided, cinnamon-red bark with fine scales. The needles are dark green above and light green underneath, which gives the foliage a silvery look. Hemlock ranks high as an ornamental plant, and is slower lived than other native conifers.

The White Pine is the largest pine in the United States. Its sturdy, gradually tapering trunk was once found as tall as 250 feed or more in the virgin forests where it grew. It is easy to distinguish from other pines because of the fineness of its needles, which are blue-green. The bark on young pines is smooth, thin and greenish brown; as the tree becomes older, the bark becomes dark gray with thick, heavy ridges.

The Shagbark Hickory is a ragged, casual-looking tree, whose form is tall and slender with an irregular, round-topped crown. The tree grows eventually to a height of 80 to 100 feet. It is the gray bark that is most unique and gives the tree its name. Long, shaggy strips are attached by their centers leaving each end free to curl. As an ornamental tree, the Shagbark gives an air of country informality.

The Black Locust is also known as the Common Locust or Acacia, and is one of the pod-bearing trees, clusters of which can be seen hanging on small branches. The oblong crown is open and irregular, and the bark also looks tough and is brown with a reddish cast. Heavy furrows form interlacing vertical ridges. Black Locust trees grow very fast in deep, well drained soil, but they will tolerate poor soil and city smoke.

The White Ash is tall, stately, and dignified. Trees reaching 70 to 80 feet tall are common among this largest of the Ash. It has a strong, usually straight trunk and a broad, rounded head, with thick branches growing opposite from another. The bark is rich and dignified, ash-gray in color, becoming very thick and deeply divided by narrow diamond-shaped furrows into flat ridges.

The Sugar Maple has been a well used tree in New England. In early spring when the snow begins to melt and the sap begins to rise, the sweet sap is made into maple syrup and sugar. Often Sugar Maples were planted along roadsides and in front of colonial homes where they took on a dignified form. Young trees have a smooth, silvery bark, which later becomes a dark gray and breaks up into hard, flinty flakes, sometimes deeply grooved.

The Red Maple is usually a moderate-sized tree from 40 to 50 feet tall. It is known as the Swamp Maple because it thrives in any moist, fertile soil. As the tree grows older, the bark darkens to a deeper gray, with shallow fissures amd long flakey ridges. The fissures are much shallower than those on the Sugar Maple.

Source: Trees in a Winter Landscape, by Alice Upham Smith

Franklin Park Wilderness

Welcome to the wilderness, a unique and beautiful area to explore and from which to learn. Designed by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, it is an integral part of a vision to provide Boston's urban dwellers with an experience of the country within the confines of the city.

As you tread these paths, please notice the incredible variety of flora and fauna and the masterful ways they interact to create an environmental whole. If you stand still, you might see a cotton tail rabbit or glimpse a migrating warbler. At night you can hear an owl hoot and perhaps notice the red fox on the hunt.

This guided walk is meant to raise awareness about the Franklin Park Wilderness. Like all natural habitats the Wilderness is fragile. This is especially so because, different from a large untouched forest, the Wilderness is strongly impacted by the city surrounding it, depending on the maintenance of experts to ensure its ecological health and the appreciation of the public to ensure its future.

The program to reinvigorate the Wilderness is a joint project of the Franklin Park Coalition, the Boston GreenSpace Alliance and the Boston Parks and Recreation department. We welcome your sharing in the beauty of this natural habitat. It is ours to cherish and its preservation depends on us all.

Martha Karchere, President
Franklin Park Coalition

Nancy Kafka, President
Boston GreenSpace Alliance

Justine Liff, Commissioner
Boston Parks and Recreation

Thanks to the following organizations that have supported this work:

The Mass. Department of Environmental Management
The Cox Charitable Trust
The Boston Edison Foundation
The Bank Boston Foundation

Next up, at a major intersection of paths, on the right edge of the walk, is another senior. Though not officially a specimen, this is very large for a **American Hornbeam** *(Carpinus caroliniana)* **(3)**, also known as Blue Beech or Ironwood. This tree was certified in 1999 as a State Champion: the largest known Blue Beech in Massachusetts!

As you continue on the paved path curving up to the left, notice the mixed grove of large oaks on your right. Just before the path forks, there is a giant **White Oak** *(Quercus alba)* **(4)** near the right edge of the path. Compare its leaves and bark with the others nearby. Proceed straight ahead at the fork.

Soon the pavement ends. Up ahead, as the forest thins, is another large **White Oak** to your left. Bearing a little left here, you will see a tall, straight **Pitch Pine** *(Pinus rigida)* **(5)**. Turn left on the intersecting path here. You may wish to take a slight detour here, off to the right, onto a large open area of ledge rock. You will see a few more Pitch Pines, as well as Oaks, surviving on the thin soils here. This is the highest point in the vicinity, about 180' above sea level.

Back on the path, stay to the left, heading back into the woods. On either side of the trail here are significant "snags", standing deadwood that provide forage and habitat for birds. Curving right, fork right and then turn right again onto a paved path. We're now in the midst of a grove of **Eastern, or Canadian, Hemlock** (Tsuga Canadensis) **(6)**. So little sunlight penetrates the foliage of these magnificent trees that almost nothing will grow under them. A cool place to escape the summer heat.

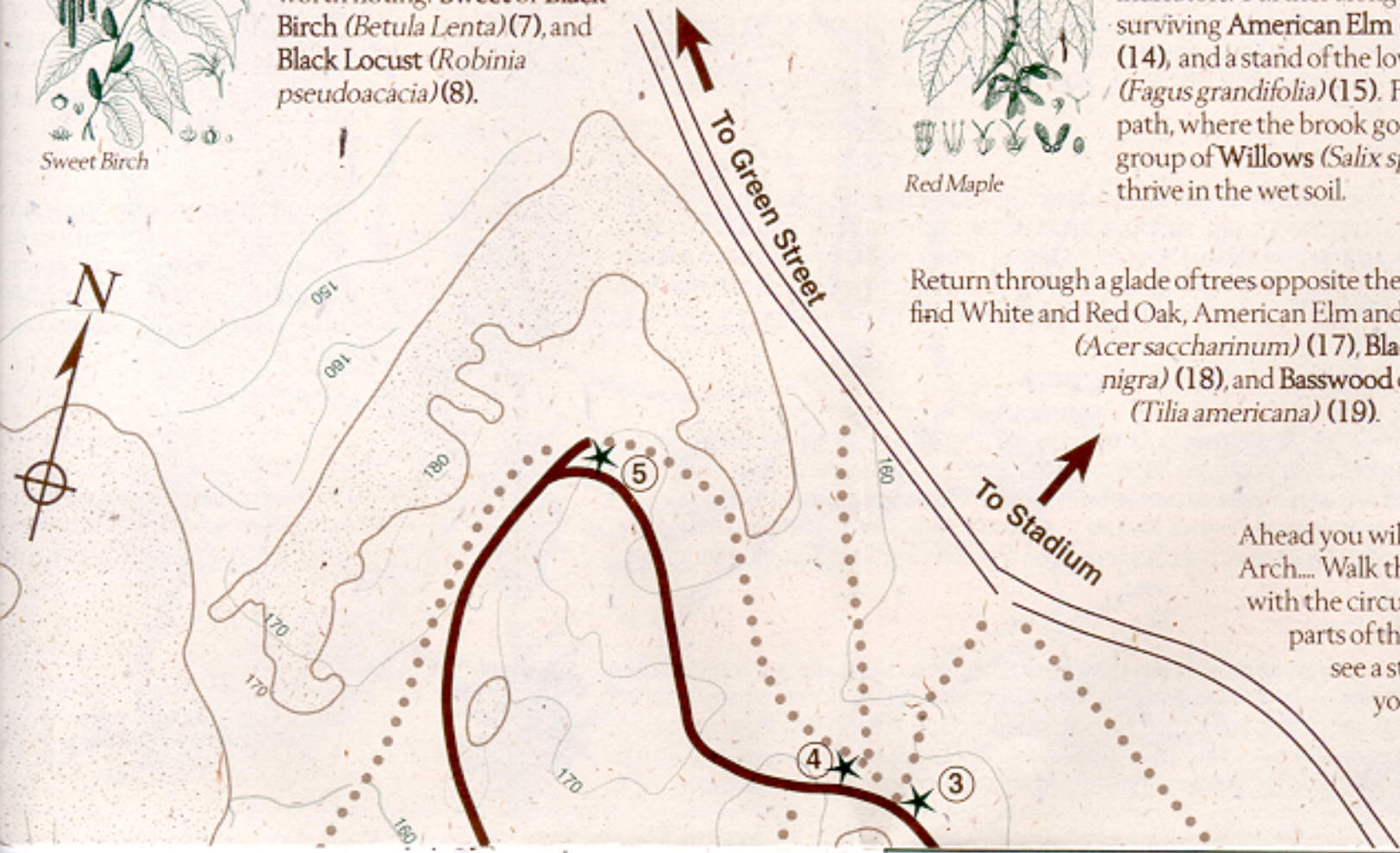
Taking the paved path to the right, immediately on your left is a **Shagbark Hickory (12)** *(Carya ovata)*. Up the trail about a hundred yards, at another large Pine, head off the path to the right into an open area of Oaks, Pines, grasses and blueberry. Continuing on the trail, descend the steps to the Williams Street Path. Turn right and head down toward Williams Street, with a brook on your left.

Sweet Birch

Leaving the Hemlocks, the path bends around to the left, sloping downward. Two trees on the left are worth noting: **Sweet** or **Black Birch** *(Betula Lenta)* **(7)**, and **Black Locust** *(Robinia pseudoacacia)* **(8)**.

Red Maple

Growing almost in the stream are several **Red Maples** *(Acer rubra)* **(13)**, one of the native plants of the Northeast that are wetlands indicators. Further along the stream are a few surviving **American Elm** *(Ulmus americana)* **(14)**, and a stand of the lovely **American Beech** *(Fagus grandifolia)* **(15)**. Finally, at the end of the path, where the brook goes underground, are a group of **Willows** *(Salix sp.)* **(16)**. These also thrive in the wet soil.



Return through a glade of trees opposite the brook. Here you will find White and Red Oak, American Elm and Beech, **Silver Maple** *(Acer saccharinum)* **(17)**, **Black Walnut** *(Juglans nigra)* **(18)**, and **Basswood** or **American Linden** *(Tilia americana)* **(19)**.

Ahead you will see the Ellicot Arch.... Walk through to connect with the circuit path and other parts of the Park. You will also see a stand of large Oaks to your left.

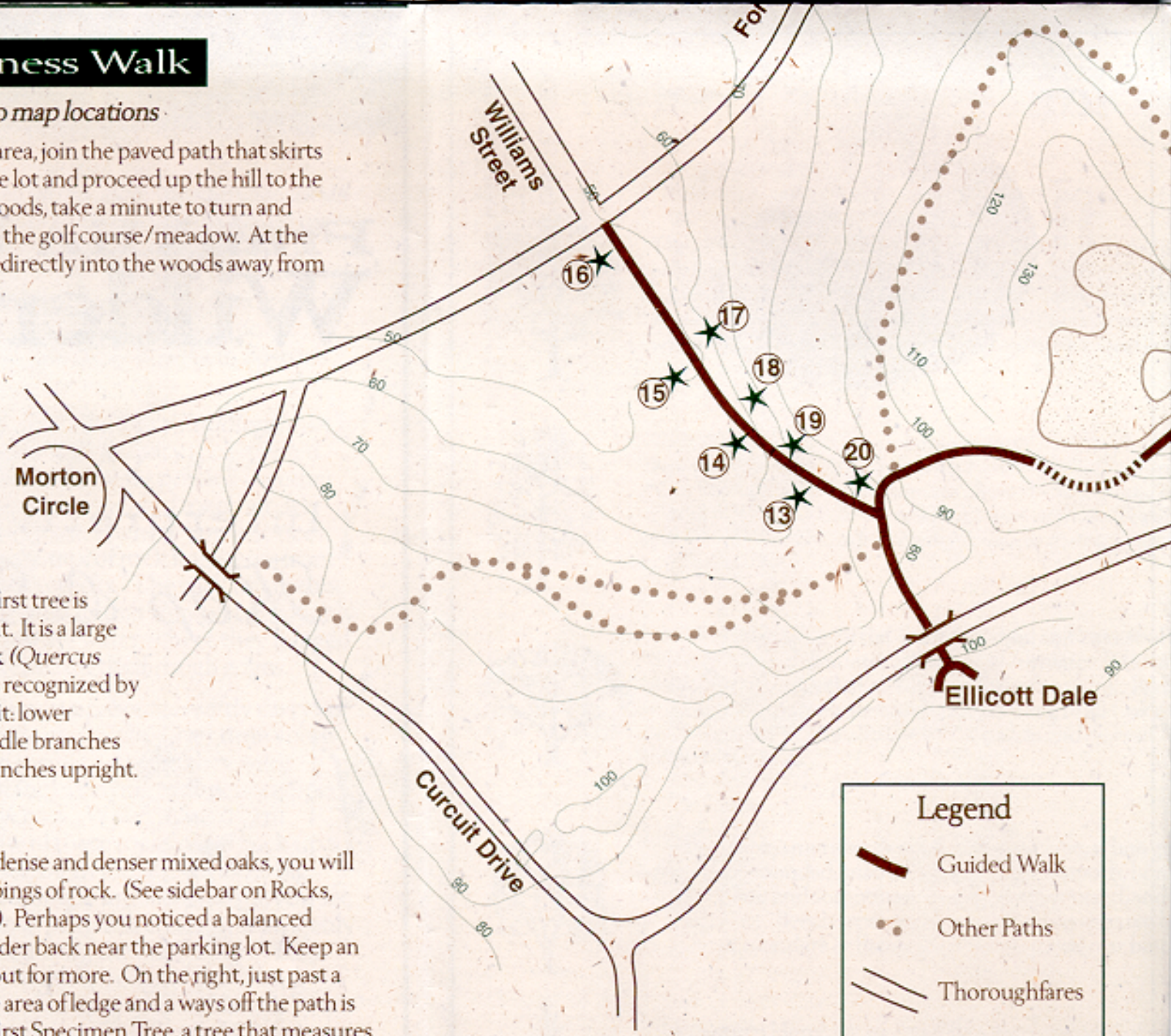
The Wilderness Walk

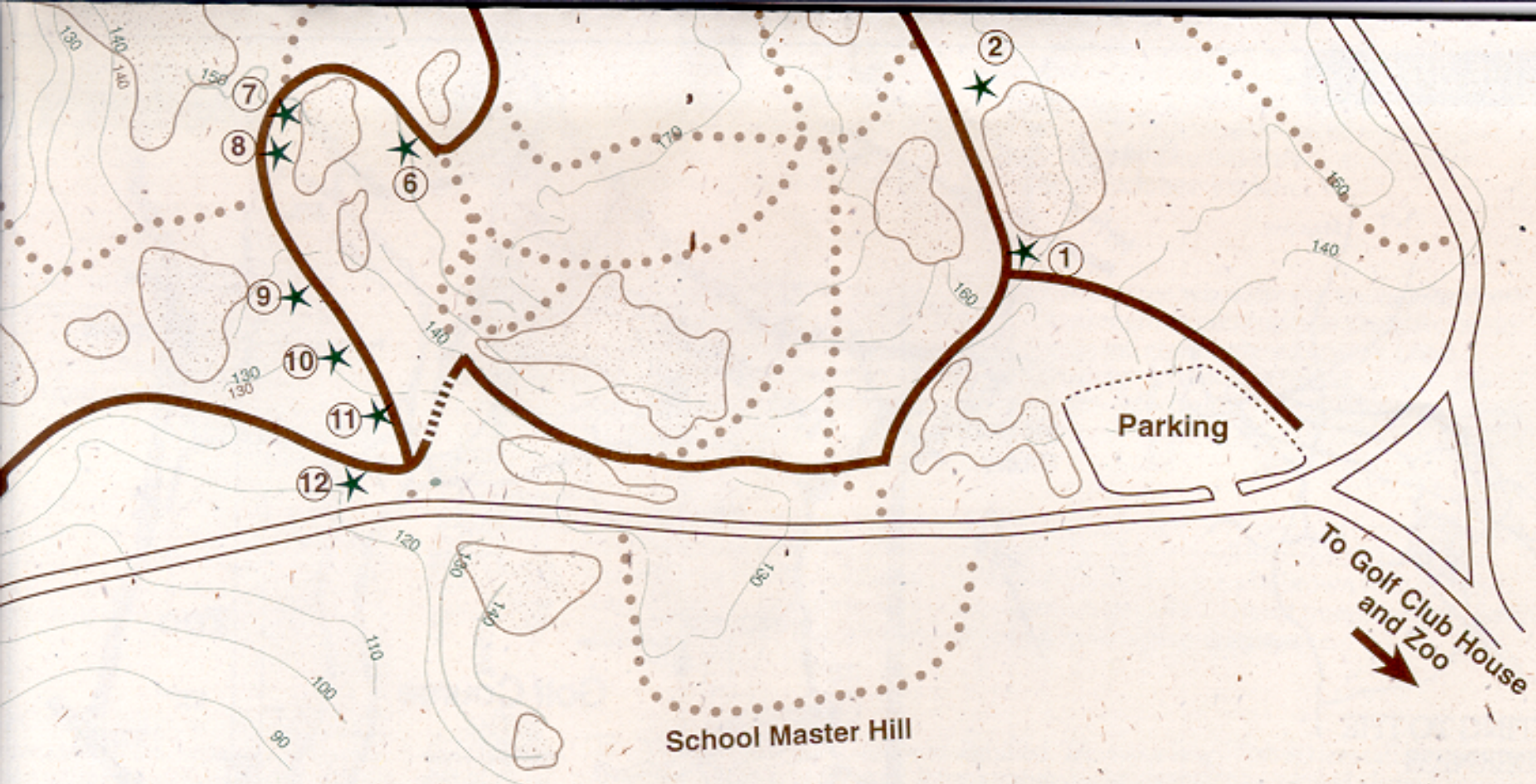
Numbers in text refer to map locations

As you leave the parking area, join the paved path that skirts the back right corner of the lot and proceed up the hill to the left. Before entering the woods, take a minute to turn and enjoy the vista back across the golf course/meadow. At the fork in the path, bear right directly into the woods away from the golf course.

Our first tree is immediately on your right. It is a large (@ 24" diameter) **Pin Oak** *(Quercus palustris)* **(1)**. This tree is recognized by its distinctive growth habit: lower branches pendulous, middle branches horizontal, and upper branches upright.

Moving on into medium dense and denser mixed oaks, you will also begin to see outcroppings of rock. (See sidebar on Rocks, over). Perhaps you noticed a balanced boulder back near the parking lot. Keep an eye out for more. On the right, just past a large area of ledge and a ways off the path is the first Specimen Tree, a tree that measures 30 or more inches in DBH (Diameter at Breast Height). This one is a **Red Oak** *(Quercus rubra)* **(2)**, and probably dates back to the Civil War or so.





Continue down Hagbourne Hill, towards Circuit Drive, the main road through the Park. On your right about halfway down are two of the oldest and largest trees in these woods. A **Black Oak (9)** and a **White Oak (10)**, they measure between 48 and 54 inches DBH and have been estimated to be around 200 years old. Opposite these mighty Oaks, on the left hand slope, notice the young **Eastern White Pine** (*Pinus strobus*) **(11)** seedlings regenerating here. A little farther on the right is a mature example of this tree.

White Pine

At this point, you may continue the walk by turning right before the road, or turn left up the steps to return to the start. Skip ahead to the "99 Steps" if you choose the latter.

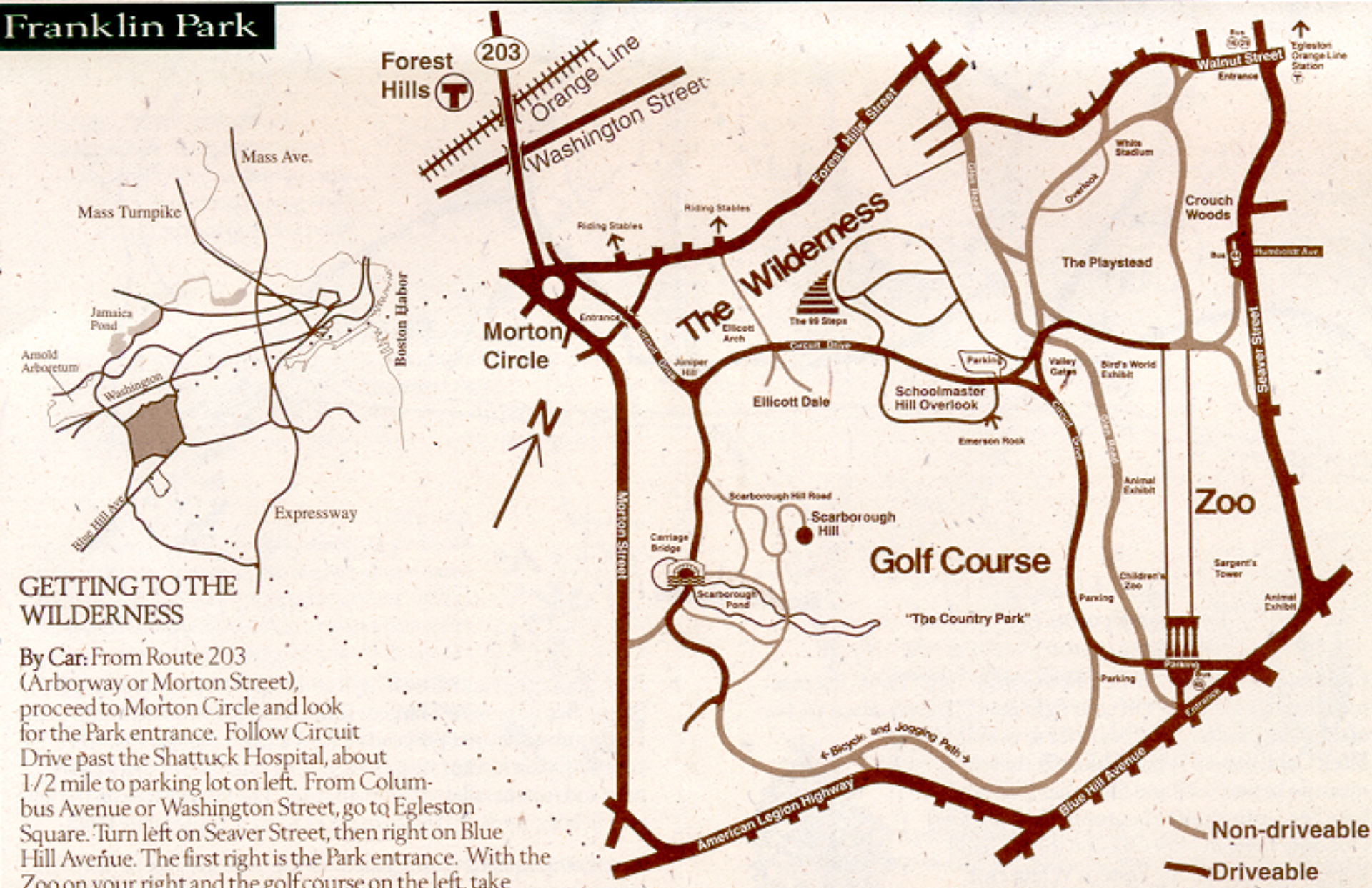
Back under the tunnel, turn right and begin the ascent of the 99 Steps. Two large **Sweet Birches (20)** are on the left. Returning to the Hagbourne Hill area, proceed straight ahead up more steps (keep counting), to a landing near the top. The tour takes a sharp right here and runs parallel to the main road. The leaning tree on the left is a Hickory, damaged by Hurricane Gloria of September 1985.

Keep going straight until a path from the drive intersects. Turn left here to return to the parking area.

The project was coordinated by the Boston GreenSpace Alliance and the Franklin Park Coalition for the Boston Parks and Recreation Department and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy.

Compiled by Ralph Daniels
Graphic Design by Adrian C. Fabos
Source: Silva of North America, Sargeant

Franklin Park



GETTING TO THE WILDERNESS

By Car: From Route 203 (Arborway or Morton Street), proceed to Morton Circle and look for the Park entrance. Follow Circuit Drive past the Shattuck Hospital, about 1/2 mile to parking lot on left. From Columbus Avenue or Washington Street, go to Egleston Square. Turn left on Seaver Street, then right on Blue Hill Avenue. The first right is the Park entrance. With the Zoo on your right and the golf course on the left, take Circuit Drive to the parking lot on the right, just past the fork.

By Public Transportation: By Subway: Take the Orange Line to Green Street. Leaving the station, turn right on Green Street, cross Washington Street by the Police Station, then continue on Glen Road up the hill and into the Park. Stay on the paved road and keep bearing right until you reach an auto road. Turn right, then right again at the parking lot.

By Bus: From Forest Hills Station: The #16 stops near Shattuck Hospital and at the Zoo. From Mattapan Station: The #28 and #29 stops at the Zoo. From Ashmont Station: The #22 stops at the Zoo. From Roslindale Square: The #14 stops at the Zoo. From Ruggles Station the #45 stops at the Zoo and the #44 stops at Seaver Street and Humboldt Avenue. From the Zoo/Blue Hill Avenue, enter the Park with the Zoo on your right, walking towards the golf course. Walk along the circuit path with the course on your left to the parking lot at the start of the trail. From Humboldt Avenue, enter the Park, cross the playing fields, past the back entrance to the Zoo, to the parking lot.

Franklin Park Coalition
P.O. Box 2333
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

Frederick Law
Olmsted, Sr.